

Thai villagers walk hours to see Singapore doctors, nurses



Singapore medical doctors caring for a sick child.

Photo: Radion International

The bedridden woman in her 80s had no one to care for her, feed her or clean her.

Her plight is something that will remain with Miss Madeleine Lam (right), who met the woman when she spent eight days in northern Thailand as part of a medical mission this year.

Miss Lam, 28, is a senior staff nurse from Home Nursing Foundation and the founder of Project Light.

Started in 2014, Project Light is organised annually by Singaporean nursing professionals to bring much-needed healthcare and education to under-reached communities abroad. Non-Singaporeans are also welcome to join this initiative.

Miss Lam said: "We were visiting the homes of those who couldn't travel to the clinics when we met the elderly woman.

"The first thing she told us was that she's hungry so we fed her. We smelled urine on her bed and hence we changed her bedsheet.

"It's really heart-rending. Sometimes all they want is a caring touch and a listening ear."

From Jan 18 to 25, six nurses, two doctors and one volunteer from Project Light went to three mountainous villages in northern Thailand - Khek Noi, Huay Nam Khao and Romklao.

The team had to take annual leave and even no pay leave to go on the trip and they paid for it from their own pockets.

There, they provided clinical care, healthcare education to a local school and distributed warm clothes and food to the villagers.

For the trip, the group worked together with Radion International, a Singapore relief and development organisation based in Thailand.

It is the second time Project Light has collaborated with Radion International for their medical mission.

Mr Eugene Wee, 35, founder and director of Radion International, said: "When the villagers hear that a Singaporean medical team is coming, they will walk for hours just to receive medical attention.

"Needs are immense."

"However, through partners like Project Light, we have managed to bring life-saving aid to hundreds of villagers who have little or no access to healthcare."

Travelling from Radion International's field office, where the team lived, to some of these villages took up precious time.

As it took three hours to drive up the mountains where the villages were located and another three hours back down, the team would leave Radion's field office at about six or seven in the morning.

The team would then spend about nine hours at the clinic before leaving in the evening.

Miss Lam said: "We receive about 100 patients in a day, which can get really hectic, but luckily, they patiently waited for their turns.

Singapore doctors and nurses bring healthcare, education to villagers in northern Thailand

Photo Source: Radion International, Facebook/Project Light

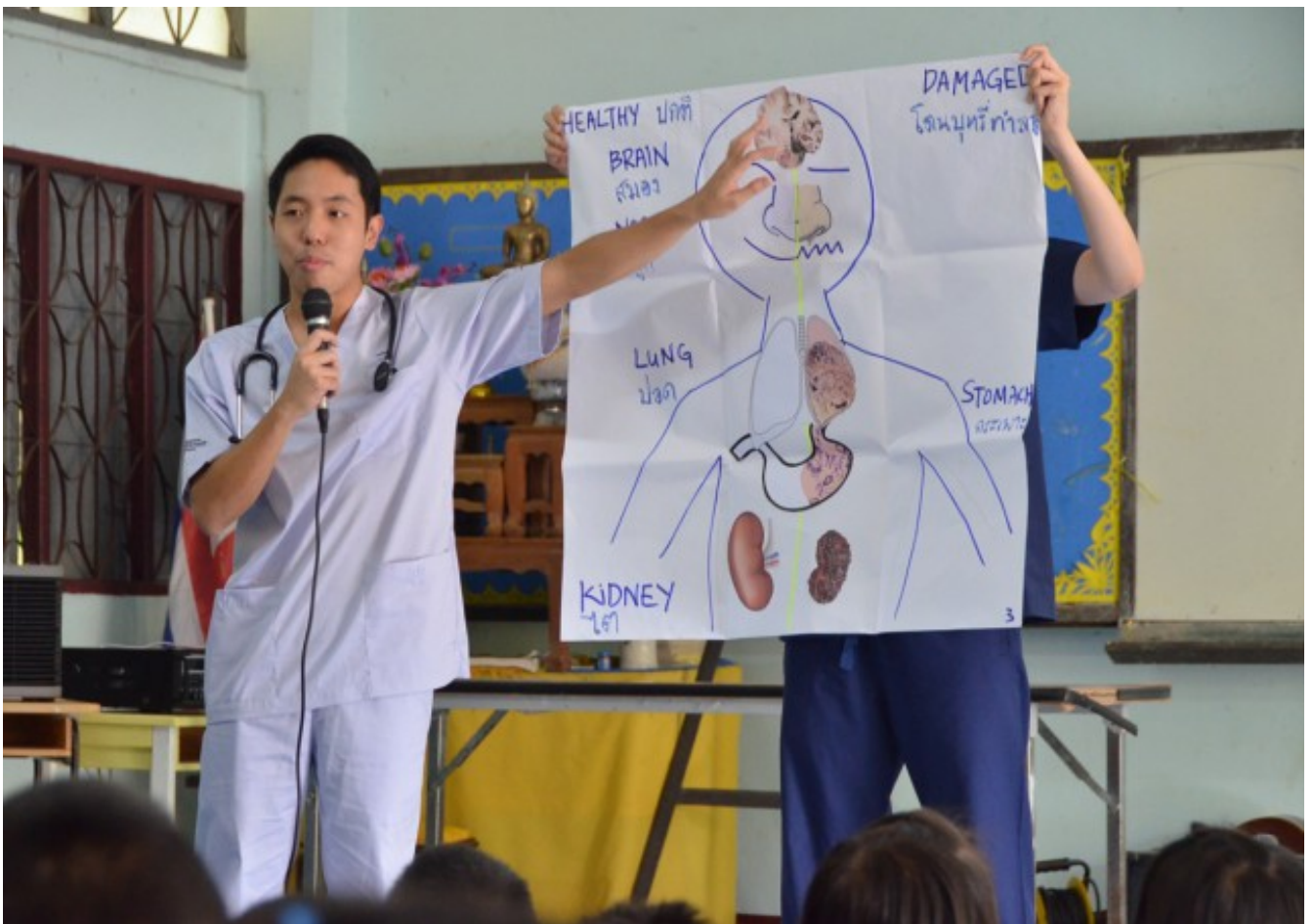


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CHECK UPS

"We give them health check-ups, consultations and prescribe them the necessary medicine.

"It's a wonderful feeling when you get to render help to those who need it," she said.

Another nurse from the team, Mr Lee Ang Yun, 27, also talked about the importance of understanding the villagers' culture.

The nurse from the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore said: "Some of the villagers go to witch doctors and seek alternative medicine or treatment, but we have to understand that it's in their culture and respect that.

"Only from there can we educate them on basic health knowledge, which some lack."

The team said that the challenges they faced included coordinating their leave, pre-trip preparation and funding.

But seeing the smiles on the villagers' faces made the tough preparation worth it.

Miss Lam said: "Some of them gave us hugs and even cried so we cried along with them."

Mr Wee said about the team from Project Light: "Most young professionals will be busy pursuing their careers, but this team opted on a road less taken just to better the lives of people living in the fringes of society.

"I think their story is exceptional and this is something that Singaporeans should hear about and support."

You can learn more about Project Light by contacting them at 2015projectlight@gmail.com.

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